CATALOGUES OF ART EXHIBITIONS ORGANIZED BY THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN REPUBLISHED ON MICROFICHE

Published on microfiche by:

Chadwyck-Healey Ltd
45 South Street
Bishops Stortford
Herts CM23 3AG
England

Somerset House
417 Maitland Avenue
Teaneck
New Jersey 07666
USA

Date of publication and production of master: 1975

Series: The purpose of this series is to make available those catalogues that have lasting interest through their text or their illustrations. Catalogues and cumulations of titles in the series are available from the publishers

Serial numbers: Each title is given a seven-figure serial number in the top right hand corner of the microfiche title strip. This is an accession number. The first figure indicates the number of the list in which the title first appears; the first three-figure group signifies the gallery or museum; the second three-figure group the accession number for that title.

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Technical data:

Producing laboratory: Micromedia Ltd, Kidlington, Oxford.

FLOWER PRINTS

MCMLI

FLOWER PRINTS have an almost universal appeal. Charming and colourful, they really need no explanation, but behind their spontaneous attraction to the eye and the quiet pleasure they give us there is a fascinating history of their production.

Most of the prints in this little collection are eighteenth or nineteenth century work; they do not, of course, attempt to give a picture of the whole development of botanical illustration throughout the ages.

As far back as the fifteenth century B.C., plant drawings were being made, and we can see them today, carved in stone, in the Great Temple of Thutmose III at Karnak. Pliny tells us that herbals of the first century B.C. often had coloured illustrations and there still exist herbals of the sixth and seventh centuries, but during the Dark and early Middle Ages botanical illustration steadily declined. This decay was arrested towards the close of the Middle Ages, when the eyes of the world were opened once again to the beauties of Nature. Outstanding in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are Dürer and Leonardo da Vinci whose wonderful flower drawings are known to most of us in reproductions.

Towards the close of the sixteenth century there began an interest in the cultivation of garden plants—the desire for

things that were beautiful rather than useful—and a natural outcome of this was the demand created by wealthy amateurs, and in France by royal patrons, to have made for them magnificent picture books illustrating their favourite flowers. In the seventeenth century there were produced, on the Continent, a number of these delightful florilegia with etched or engraved illustrations. In England, at the same time as Redouté and his school were adding new lustre to the long tradition of botanical illustration in France, a group of talented artists were producing flower-books which were scarcely, if at all, inferior to the work in France.

Today the art of the flowerprint has practically gone, though there have been in England such notable exceptions as the wood-engravings of Clare Leighton, the colour lithographs of John Farleigh and John Nash, and the hand-coloured lithographs made by Lilian Snelling and Stella Ross-Craig for the Botanical Magazine.

Most of the prints here shown have been generously lent by Mr. Wilfrid Blunt whose recently published book "The Art of Botanical Illustration" (Collins, 'New Naturalist' series) is a fascinating study of the whole field, and should be read by all who find pleasure in these prints.

CATALOGUE

1 CLEMATIS *Basil Besler* (1561-1629)
The Prince Bishop of Eichstatt was Besler's patron and laid out 3,000 florins to cover the cost of Besler's "Hortus Eystettensis": two immense volumes published in 1613. Besler's work shows a splendidly decorative arrangement.

2 CARNATIONS *Basil Besler*

3 NARCISSUS *J. Weinmann* (*German 18th Century*)
Plate from "Phytanthoza Iconographia" (published 1737-45), a vast work in 8 folio volumes with over 1,000 hand-coloured engravings.

4 DOUBLE MUSK ROSE *Pierre-Joseph Redouté* (1759-1840)
The most celebrated flower painter of his day. At the age of 13 Redouté set out to earn his living as an itinerant artist, and wherever he travelled he studied the paintings of the great Flemish Masters. In 1782 he went to Paris and there attracted the attention of a wealthy botanist. He later found a generous patroness in Joséphine Bonaparte who poured out money for the publication of magnificent folios. To this period belong "Les Roses" (1817-24) from which this engraved stipple print comes.

5 DOUBLE BALSAM *John Edwards* (*died* 1795)
John Edwards of Brentford made some very decorative illustrations for his "British Herbal" (1770) and "A Collection of Flowers drawn after Nature and disposed in an Ornamental and Picturesque Manner" (1783-85).

6 IRIS *Gerard von Spaendonck* (1746-1822)
Stipple engraving by F. Le Grand, after a painting by von Spaendonck from "Fleurs désinées d'après Nature",

published about 1800, probably the finest engravings of flowers ever made.

7 CONVOLVULUS AND JASMIN *Mdlle. Perrot*
French work, early 19th Century.

8 CALOCHORTUS
From "Transactions of the Horticultural Society"; 10 vols. published between 1805 and 1848.
PURPLE STRIPED TULIP *James Andrews*
From "The Parterre, or Beauties of Flora", published 1842.

9 TULIPS *Basil Besler*

10 FLOWERS OF THE IRIS FAMILY *Elizabeth Twining* (1805-89)
A granddaughter of Richard Twining the tea-merchant. Founder of the 'Mothers' Meeting'. This print is from her "Illustrations of Natural Orders" (1849-55).

11 STRIPED CARNATIONS: LANCASHIRE LASS: YOUNG'S EARL GREY *Artist unknown—English, 18th Century*
PRIMULA *J. R. Guillot—Belgian, 19th Century.*

12 MOSS ROSE AND OLD LACED PINKS
These two contemporary lithographs are the work of John Farleigh and are from a set of 11 done to illustrate "Old Fashioned Flowers" by Sacheverell Sitwell, published in 1939.

13 CHESTNUT *Nicolas Robert* (1614-85)
This plate comes from the "Recueil des Plantes"—the finest collection of flower engravings made in the 17th Century.

14 PASSION FLOWER
Artist unknown, circa 1850 (possibly from "The Indian

Garden" by Cookson).

HABROTHAMNUS *Miss Drake (of Turnham Green)*
Almost nothing is known of this artist save her work for the "Botanical Register", "The Transactions of the Horticultural Society", and Lindley's "Sertum Orchidaceum" (1837-1845).

15 ROSE DE MAI *Pierre-Joseph Redouté*

16 MAGNOLIA *Georg Dionysius Ehret* (1708-70)
Ehret walked, one August, every day from Chelsea to Fulham and back, to study the opening of the buds of a new magnolia. This illustration is from Trew's "Plantae Selectae" (published 1750-53).

17 SUNFLOWER AND NASTURTIUM *Ch. Geoffroy*
These charming illustrations are from Grandville's "Les Fleurs Animées" pub. 1846.

18 TULIP 'POMPE FUNEBRE' *James Sowerby*, (1757-1822)
Sowerby was a considerable scientist of wide interests, an artist of distinction and a talented engraver. He made upwards of 2,500 drawings for Sir James Smith's "English Botany"; these drawings may be seen in the Natural History Museum.

19 DRAGON ARUM *P. Henderson*

20 CHINESE LIMODORON *P. Reinagle*

21 NIGHT BLOWING CEREUS *P. Reinagle*

22 LARGE FLOWERING SENSITIVE PLANT *P. Reinagle*

23 AMERICAN COWSLIP *P. Henderson*
These five plates are the work of Philip Reinagle (1749-1833) and Peter Henderson who illustrated "The Temple of Flora" written and published by Robert John Thornton.

It was Thornton's idea that the artists should set their plants in the full richness of their natural setting and his own 'Explanation of the Picturesque plates' helps us to appreciate the peculiar flavour of his book. This ambitious publishing venture brought Thornton to financial ruin; but gave him fame, for the "Temple of Flora" is probably the most famous of all florilegia. The plates here shown are from the 1812 publication which is smaller than the work issued between 1799 and 1807.

24 DATURA *Pancrace Bessa* (1772-1835)
Bessa's patron was the Duchess de Berry. This is a plate from his "Fleurs et Fruits", published in 1808.

25 AURICULA *Artist unknown*
An English lithograph, probably about 1840.
AURICULA, ALDERMAN WISBEY *Worthington-Smith*, 1835-1917
Colour plate from the "Floral Magazine".

26 GLOXINIA *Artist unknown*
French print, c. 1880.

27 LARKSPUR *John Edwards*

28 WATER LILY *William Hooker* (1779-1832)
Official artist to the Horticultural Society of London. Hooker engraved the drawings of James Forbes for the latter's Oriental Memoirs (from which this plate is taken).

29 MELASTOMACEA *P. A. Poiteau*, 1766-1854
From "Monographic des Melastomacées" by von Humbold, pub. 1816-1823.

30 LILAC *Jean Louis Prévost*
Stipple engraving printed in colour, 19th Century.

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